

# Don't Limit Iran Inquiry to the Hostage Crisis

## Viewpoint

by Morton M. Kondracke

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Iran inquiry apparently will focus on the hostage crisis only; but I think it should be much broader. It should encompass our entire recent experience with Iran, beginning with 1953, when the late shah was restored to his throne with the assistance of the United States. The Iran trauma is the product of mistakes by several Presidents, not just Jimmy Carter, and we need to understand what they were, the better not to make them again.

And we could make them again. There are at least a half-dozen important countries in the world governed by authoritarian regimes friendly to the United States. What should the U.S. do if Ferdinand Marcos gets into trouble with the people of the Philippines? Or President Chon, with the South Koreans? There are other Somozas in Latin America, and other shahs in the Middle East. The lessons of Iran will not necessarily apply exactly in other places. But without having looked at the Iran experience closely, we won't know the differences from the similarities.

We shouldn't repeat the mistake we made after the Vietnam war. Congress and the Executive Branch were so anxious to avoid an "orgy of recrimination" that to this day no one has conducted a searching inquiry into the lessons of Vietnam. Yet the trauma festers in the national subconscious. It causes some Americans—including Jimmy Carter, Cyrus Vance and many liberals in Congress—to be afraid to risk armed conflict under almost any circumstances. Other Americans were so wounded by America's defeat that seemingly they can't wait for a chance to send in the Marines in order to prove that we can whup *somebody*. I suspect, if the Reagan administration intervenes in El Salvador, it will be as much for that reason as out of cool consideration of the national interest. Alexander Haig should have been asked at his confirmation hearings what lessons he draws from Vietnam, but he wasn't. The Senate should correct that mistake with President Reagan's other national security appointees.

Now that Iran is replacing Vietnam as the dominant foreign policy experience for most Americans, it's important we all really understand the areas the Senate should delve into:

The shah's regime and U.S. complicity in it. Should the U.S. have depended on Iran to guard our interests in the Persian Gulf, as the Nixon Doctrine provided, or should we have done the job ourselves? Did our policy and the weapons we sold to the shah make him a megalomaniac out of touch with his own people? What was the extent of corruption and torture in Iran, and could we have done more to stop it?

U.S. intelligence capabilities. There are persistent reports that the shah demanded, and we agreed, that the CIA would conduct no domestic operations within Iran, but would depend on intelligence provided by SAVAK. Our diplomats reportedly were under similar orders to stay away from the shah's opposition. Henry Kissinger and former CIA Director (and U.S. Ambassador in Tehran) Richard Helms deny there were any such restrictions, but Carter administration officials insist there were. As a result, they say, we failed to understand the depth of public opposition to the shah and couldn't even warn him. Reportedly, we still have similar agreements with other shaky friends. I think it would prove a resounding lesson of Iran that too few of our diplomats abroad are fluent in the local language and that too many lack contact with the local population. For one of the hostages to complain of brutality because he was deprived of meals prepared by the ambassador's chef and had to eat Iranian food suggests that our embassies (like our Army) are excessively staffed with support personnel.

Public understanding. Except for the McNeil-Lehrer program on PBS and, much later, ABC's "Nightline," American television treated the Iran crisis either as a freak show, featuring self-flagellants and fist-wavers, or as a soap opera. It's not the Senate's business to inquire why. The net-

works should ask themselves. The public should demand that they do.

The shah's fall. Probably, in retrospect, the U.S. should have given unstinting political support to the shah during his days of maximum crisis. It seems clear that equivocation earned us no credit with Khomeini. But should we have encouraged the shah to jail or kill his opponents by the thousands, if necessary, to stay in power? During the shah's final days, President Carter sent Gen. Robert E. Huyser to Iran. Was it to foment a pro-U.S. military coup or prevent one? Which should it have been?

I'm confident that the Senate will look into such other questions as: Should we have let the shah into this country? Should we have negotiated when the hostages were seized, or gone to war? How were the hostages treated? Did President Carter negotiate a good agreement, and should we live up to it?

But those are the obvious questions. We need a deeper inquiry into the Iran experience. The purpose should not be to discover "who lost Iran?" but "how to save Saudi Arabia?"

Mr. Kondracke is executive editor of The New Republic magazine. He will contribute to the "Viewpoint" column on a regular basis.

## 'Nation of rugmakers' jibe by ex-CIA head

By HUGH DAVIES in Washington

THE Iranians had enjoyed their 14 months of bargaining with America, Mr Richard Helms, the former CIA director, said last night.

Mr Helms, who was United States Ambassador to Iran while the late Shah was in power, said: "Basically they are traders and rugmakers—and they have enjoyed this."

"The fact remains that the Iranian government has paid no price for holding the hostages in an official act of terrorism. It has set a bad precedent to make it seem we are an easy touch."

Mr Helms feared that the Carter Administration's handling of the crisis was "not going to help" the work of other foreign service officers.

In the past year America had made "some mistakes in trying to warm up to Iran" and "one of the most difficult problems" was being passed to the incoming President.

This was "what to do" about Iran, especially in view of Ayatollah Khomeini's continued anti-American stance.

### Military spare parts

Mr Reagan, who has scorned the Iranian leaders as "kidnappers and barbarians," has to make an early decision on the sending of \$400 million worth of spare military parts already ordered and paid for by Iran.

The equipment was embargoed because of the hostages

and is in United States army warehouses. Iran says it needs the supplies to help fight the war with Iraq.

Mr Helms is the first prominent American to voice unease amid the euphoria in Washington about the hostage deal.

He is not expected to be the last. Dr Kissinger, former Secretary of State, has said recently that the United States had no business to bargain in the first place with a nation that had violated international law by holding diplomats captive.

It was a cardinal principle of his era at the State Department not to negotiate with kidnappers lest a precedent be set that was likely to encourage future terrorist acts against Americans.

Vice-President Walter Mondale has defended the Carter Administration, saying: "We've got some right here to put these hostages and their families at a very high priority. We want them home. We promised the Iranians that if they'd let these hostages come home, we would unfreeze these funds."

"I don't think that is improper at all under the circumstances."

However, several leading newspaper columnists in Washington are already predicting that once the excitement about the situation subsides, Americans will find they have paid a high price in terms of prestige and strength in the world.